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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE'S
INTERVIEW IN KUWAIT

1. SUMMARY: Deputy Secretary Armitage's exclusive interview with local Arabic daily Al-Rai Al-A'm (7/18) generated a wealth of coverage in the local press. The interview, which ranged widely from democracy in Kuwait and stability in Iraq to the war on terror, the Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Lebanese political situation, appeared across four pages of the paper, including the entire front page above the fold. The interview was widely noted and discussed in Kuwait, and generated even more intense scrutiny in Lebanon, where it was picked up by at least three dailies there. END SUMMARY.

2. Armitage's reassurances on several issues of concern to the Kuwaiti audience were covered closely and displayed prominently in the paper. He praised the Kuwaiti democratic model, while noting that the U.S. was not interested in imposing democracy on the region, but rather assisting homegrown reform movements. He explained that the recognition of Kuwait as a Major non-NATO Ally would carry practical benefits in areas such as security and defense cooperation and training, and would also give notice to U.S. companies that Kuwait was a good place for them to do business. He also stressed Kuwait's continued strategic importance to the U.S., countering rampant local speculation that an evolving Iraq would replace Kuwait as the U.S.'s most-favored regional partner.

3. With a circulation estimated at about 70,000, Al-Rai Al-A'm enjoys a broad readership among Kuwaitis and Arab expatriates living in Kuwait, particularly Syrians and Lebanese. Predictably, the interview ranged to issues of concern to these readers, such as the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Syria's role in the war on terror, and Lebanese politics. Deputy Secretary reiterated recent statements by President Bush that 2005 was no longer a realistic goal for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Commenting on the Security Wall, Deputy Secretary Armitage said that it must not prejudice final status or unnecessarily inconvenience Palestinians. He also said that internal conflicts within the Palestinian Authority prevented Israel from having a true partner in the peace process. On Syria, the Deputy Secretary said that Pres. Assad must do more to combat

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terror, such as securing the Syria-Iraq border. Coverage of all

4. It was Deputy Secretary Armitage's comments on Lebanon that pushed his press outside Kuwait and made his interview a two-day story locally. Deputy Secretary Armitage said that Lebanon's constitution should only be changed to extend Lebanese President Emil Lahoud's term with the full deliberation and involvement of the Lebanese people, but that currently, their fate was not in their own hands. These comments were prominently reported, alongside various editorial responses, by Lebanese dailies Al-Anwar (centrist), Al-Nahar (Christian), and Al-Mustaqbal (pro-Syria), as well as by other Gulf dailies. This coverage became the subject of a second-day story in Kuwaiti Al-Rai Al-A'm, which referred to Secretary Armitage as "Armitage the Lebanese," because of what was perceived as his call for Lebanese self-determination and full participation in their own political process.

TUELLER